

Story 1445 (1796 Tapes 30, 31

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,  
Sarıkaya kaza,  
Yozgat Province

Date: 1976

İbrahim, the Son of Ahmet Ağa<sup>1</sup>

Once in the past there was a village named Menengiç.<sup>2</sup>

In that village there were two wealthy brothers named Ahmet and Mehmet. Ahmet had a son whose name was İbrahim, and Mehmet had a daughter whose name was Debre. When the two children had grown old enough to be married, Ahmet Ağa said to İbrahim's friends, "Tell my son to choose whoever's daughter he wishes to marry, and then I shall go and ask for the girl as his bride while I am still in good health

One day while İbrahim and his friends were wandering about in the gardens of the city and spending time in coffeehouses, this matter became part of their conversation. The friends

<sup>1</sup>An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

<sup>2</sup>In an aside, the narrator indicated Menengiç village is in the kaza of Haymana of the Province of Ankara.

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said, "İbrahim, your father says that you are to tell us whose daughter you want to marry. We shall then tell him of your choice, and he will make arrangements for the wedding."

İbrahim answered, "Give my regards to my father and tell him that I should be pleased to marry my uncle's daughter. If I cannot marry her, then I do not wish to be married at all.

"Very well," they said, and they went at once to his father. "Ahmet Ağa, your son wishes to marry the daughter of your brother, Mehmet Ağa."

"Very well," said Ahmet Ağa. "This was just what I was hoping for, for this would mean that no stranger would share our property."<sup>3</sup>

One day shortly after that, Ahmet, accompanied by some elderly and respected people, went to his brother's quarters. After greetings had been exchanged, they drank coffee and smoked tobacco for a while. Then, after everyone was in good spirits, Ahmet Ağa said to Mehmet Ağa, "Brother, why do you suppose we came here today?"

<sup>3</sup>Although in many rural areas exogamy is a requirement strictly adhered to, there are now 26 percent of all marriages in northeastern Turkey that are consanguineous. The reason for this frequent marriage of cousins is usually that given here: to keep property and wealth within the family.

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"Why shouldn't you come on any day? You are always most welcome here.

"We came here with the will of Allah and the approval of the Prophet<sup>4</sup> to ask for the hand of your daughter for my son, Ibrahim."

"Inasmuch as you have considered her to be a suitable bride for your son, may she remain all of her life a satisfactory member of your household," answered Mehmet Ağa.

In those days it was customary for the family of the bridegroom to give the family of the bride a purse of money.<sup>5</sup> Ahmet Ağa had, therefore, brought with him a purse containing an amount suitable for people in their position, and he now handed it to his brother. "What is this?" asked Mehmet Ağa.

is the traditional bride-price," said Ahmet Ağa

"I am not selling the foal of a donkey! And if you need it for the wedding, I shall give you some money. Let us fly

<sup>4</sup>An appreciable percentage of Turkish marriages are not brought about by love but by parental arrangement. A matchmaker is sent to the family of the girl, and much of the dialogue between the two parties is carried on through formulaic expressions. The opening remark of the matchmaker is this: "I have come with the will of Allah and the approval of the Prophet to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage to X, the son of Y." The claim of being backed by Allah's will is a condition devoutly to be wished, and it is apparently uttered in the optative subjunctive mode.

<sup>5</sup>Neither bride-price nor dowry is entirely a thing of the past in Turkey. They are still important factors in many rural marriages.

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a banner beginning tomorrow morning announcing the wedding celebration, and let us send at once for a drummer to start beating his drum beneath this banner." They hung the banner and had a drummer play beneath it,<sup>6</sup> and this was the beginning of a wedding celebration that lasted for forty days and forty nights. The marriage was completed on a Friday,<sup>7</sup> and that night the bride and bridegroom were placed in the nuptial chamber.

Up to this time İbrahim had never worked, nor did he have a business in which other people worked for him. He had always lived comfortably on his father's wealth, and he continued to do this after he was married. Ahmet Ağa now became concerned about his son's future, and he spoke to him about this matter. He said, "My son İbrahim, when you inherit my wealth, it will soon fly out of your hand like a pigeon and disappear. It will all be gone before you know it. You may discover then that a

<sup>6</sup>Throughout the entire length of a village wedding--not forty days, of course, but often a week--drum and zurna music is played. (The zurna is a double-reed instrument akin to an oboe.) It is the drum, however, which is the attention getter, for it can be heard at a much greater distance.

<sup>7</sup>Despite the fact that since the founding of the Republic, Sunday has been the day when most shops are closed and when most people do not work, the Moslem sabbath has always been, and still is, on Friday. It is difficult to know how many real-life wedding ceremonies end on Friday, but in Turkish folktales, Friday is the day on which most end.

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girl will love you only so long as you have plenty of money. If you do no work yourself, then at least have someone work for you. If you cannot see yourself, have someone else see for you. If you do not make a practice of adding to the wealth you inherit, it will disappear quickly.

Although his father had spoken words of wisdom, İbrahim ignored them completely. They entered one of his ears and went out the other ear. But there came a day when not only his father and mother died, but so too did his uncle, Mehmet Ağa, and his aunt. And not long after that there came another day when he could not even find enough money left to enable him to buy cigarettes.

One day he sat poking the ashes in the fireplace while he thought about his situation. While he was doing this, his wife went to get water from the public fountain. While she was there, she saw a Kurdish<sup>8</sup> girl coming along on a camel. The Kurdish girl had a hand spindle, and as she rode along, she was spinning wool into yarn. In those days, camels like hers used to have three bells. One was tied to the camel's head, and as it rang, it said, "My ağa is rich." One was tied to the camel's neck, and as it rang, it asked, "Where did he

<sup>8</sup>The Kurds, numbering several million people, are the largest minority group in Turkey today. A few may be affluent, but most of them are not.

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get his wealth?" And the third bell, which hung from the camel's belly answered, "From here and there! From here and there!"

The messages of the camel bells made Ibrahim's uncle's daughter very sad, for although they had once been rich, now they were very poor. She filled her pitchers with water and returned home, where she saw her husband standing by the fireplace and still idly poking at the ashes. She said to him "Sit down, my uncle's son, sit down! You used up all of my uncle's wealth, and then you used up all of my father's wealth. Now go outside and look at the people who were not even half as rich as we were, and you will see that they are now preparing to take their flocks to the yayla."<sup>9</sup>

Ibrahim thought, "Aman,"<sup>10</sup> my father's words of warning have come true! May this country be haram<sup>11</sup> to me!" He went

<sup>9</sup>A summer pasture in the mountains. Those who own herds of livestock take these animals to mountain pasturage in the summer because grazing charges are low there or, in some cases, nonexistent. Few can afford to graze stock in fertile lowland fields where crops are normally grown.

<sup>10</sup>A mild expletive which in a negative sense may equal Alas or Oh, my goodness; in a more positive sense it may mean something similar to Wow or Golly.

<sup>11</sup>Helal/Haram--Moslem religious concepts. That which is helal is that which is permissible according to canonical law. That which is haram is forbidden. There is no obligation or restriction or penalty for doing or taking whatever is helal, but there will be a penalty on Judgment Day for doing or taking what is forbidden. To accept something from a donor is helal;

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outside and headed down the road away from the house.

When his cousin saw Ibrahim leave, she said, "Aman! I have struck my axe against a rock! I have offended him. I wonder where he is going?" She ran outside of the house and down the road. On the outskirts of the village there was a hill, and she caught up with him on the top of that hill.

my cousin, don't do this! I made a mistake in what I said, but don't you make a mistake in what you do! Come back sit by the fireplace, and I shall go out and beg or do whatever I have to in order to get enough money to buy our food

But Ibrahim would not be persuaded by anything that she said. "I made a vow that this country would be haram to me, and so I cannot remain here." He then sat down and sang a farewell song. Let us listen and hear what he sang.

As I leave, I shall trust you to Allah's care.

My gentle love, remain right here.

If I leave my land to go elsewhere,

My cool-eyed love may gauge my worth

I become a stranger because of love.

to take it or steal it is haram. To do anything morally or religiously improper is haram. Dying or endangered people often declare helal anything they have given to or done for another person, so that No. 2 will not go to Judgment indebted to another (which is haram unless declared helal by the benefactor.)

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I am going now, but I shall return.

us pardon each other, my stately love.

I have a commitment. Don't hold me back.

Think not I'd turn against my vow

I'd grieve for our parents until I died.

Though my love may hug me and say not to go,

Our kismet takes shape in a distant place

us pardon each other, my stately love

İbrahim says he cannot stay here;

He cannot cure all wounds as Lokman<sup>12</sup> did

I am leaving here, my rose-faced love

Even now I cannot see her face

As I start my journey from this place

No matter how hard his cousin argued with him, İbrahim continued on his way. As he went, he thought to himself, "Where am I going? Where can I find a job? They say that Kayseri is an industrial city. I shall go to Kayseri and search for a suitable job for myself. I shall earn some money there."

When he finally reach Kayseri, he wandered among business buildings and marketplaces looking for a job. As he was passing

<sup>12</sup>Legendary figure of ancient times whose role most often referred to was that of a physician who could cure seemingly incurable illnesses. He appears in Chapter XXXI of the Koran. For a synopsis of his many roles and studies of these roles, see Walker and Uysal, Tales Alive in Turkey, p. 264.



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through one marketplace, he met one of the many merchants who used to stop at his village as they went back and forth from Kayseri to İstanbul. These merchants had always shown respect hospitality in his village, and the merchant that he now was glad to see him. "Oh, İbrahim," he said, "what is it brings you to Kayseri?" He then took İbrahim to his home gave him food to eat. Then he asked again, "İbrahim, why you come here? Do you have some problem? If so, do not be shy about it, but tell me what it is so that I might help you."

İbrahim thought of his former wealth and he was ashamed to say that he had come to Kayseri in search of work. Instead, he said [Tape 31 begins here], "I have bought some livestock from a dealer in Aleppo,<sup>13</sup> and I am on my way to get them."

"Well, stay with us for the night, and tomorrow you can continue on to Aleppo."

İbrahim stayed for the night with the merchant and his family. In the morning after drinking tea and coffee, he bade hosts farewell and set forth on the road to Aleppo, though he did not actually intend to go to that city. He thought,

<sup>13</sup>Part of the Ottoman Empire before World War I, Aleppo has since then been the second-largest city of Syria. In the Middle East the city is usually called Halep, but it is known in Western countries as Aleppo.

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"There are too many people in Kayseri who know my family, and so I could not stay there. I shall go to Adana and find a in that city."

But when he reached Adana, he had more of the same experience he had had in Kayseri. As he walked about the streets looking for a job, he met ağas he had known in his wealthy days. "Oh, İbrahim, why did you ever come to Adana?" they asked him. One of them took him home for the night. After they had eaten dinner, his host asked him again, "İbrahim, what are you doing here in Adana? Are you in some difficulty? Do not be ashamed to tell us."

But again İbrahim was too embarrassed to admit that he had come to Adana in search of a job. He repeated what he had

to his friend in Kayseri. "I bought some livestock from a dealer in Aleppo, and I am on my way to get those animals and take them back to my village

"Well, anyway," said the ağa, "you can stay with us for the night and continue on to Aleppo tomorrow." After breakfast on the following morning, they bade each other farewell, and the ağa said, "Remember us in your prayers, and if we all remain in good health, we shall meet again."

As İbrahim was leaving the ağa's house, he thought, "There too many people who know me in Adana. I cannot take a job here, and so I might as well go on to Aleppo." When he

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finally reached Aleppo, he found a job in one of the market-places of that city, and he found a coffeehouse in which he could sleep each night.

He worked for several months in the marketplace, and he slept every night in the coffeehouse. One morning when he woke up, he felt especially homesick for his native village, and he missed more than ever his cousin. He decided to sing a song that would lessen his sorrow. Putting his hand to his ear,<sup>14</sup> he began to sing. As he was doing this, the pasha<sup>15</sup> of Aleppo was passing the coffeeshop on his way to work. The pasha sat down and listened to the song. Let us also listen

I may never again touch the hand of my loved one  
My beauty's silken face is nowhere near.  
On my branch the summer nightingale sings not,  
And there's no one left to comfort me.  
Straighten your feathers like those of the peacock!  
Lengthen your neck like that of the duck!  
Wear only black and throw away red!  
Like the scent of an herb my beauty has vanished,

<sup>14</sup>Minstrels and muezzins (who sing and chant the call to prayer) often place a hand over one ear--apparently to enable them to hear their own voices better.

<sup>15</sup>Today pasha means simply general. During the Ottoman era it often meant military governor of a province.

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And İbrahim sounds his lament: "Oh, where have you gone?"

My ancestors lie in the same earth that yours do.

For the sake of Menengiç in Haymana now I sing.

After the pasha had listened to this song, he went on to his office. There he said to two guards, "There is a man singing in such and such a coffeehouse. Go there and get him and bring him here to me." The guards did as they had been ordered to do and they brought İbrahim to the pasha's office. "Selamünaleyküm," said the pasha.

"Aleykümselam,"<sup>16</sup> answered İbrahim.

"Where are you from, son?"

"I am from the village of Menengiç in the Haymana district of Ankara Province."

"Very well, son. Now tell me whom you have back in your own country."

"I have no one. All my life is between just Allah and me

"Don't lie, my son. Have you neither mother nor father neither brother nor sister nor wife?"

"No, I don't have anyone, my pasha. There are only Allah and I."

<sup>16</sup>Selamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam--traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you, too. If Selamünaleyküm is not responded to, the speaker should be wary of the one so addressed.

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"Look here, son. If in the future anyone should come here looking for you, your head will be sent to the executioners. Do you agree to that?"

"I agree."

"Very well, then. I have only a daughter in this world. When I heard you sing, my soul went out to you, and I have decided to make you my son-in-law. Would you agree to that?"

İbrahim neither said that he agreed to that nor said that he did not agree to that. But there is an old proverb which says "Silence gives consent,"<sup>17</sup> and after a few seconds the pasha said, "Well, we understand each other on this matter."

The pasha then invited a number of notable and important people to his home that night for dinner. The tables were loaded with food, and after they had all eaten and drunk for some time, one of the older guests asked a question. He said, "Pasha, did you see your father in a dream last night? Why did you gather us all here? We have all eaten and drunk much from your tables, and may Allah grant you even more. But do you have some wish to express, some order to give, or some problem to discuss? Tell us what it is."

"No, I do not have any wish to express, any order to give,

<sup>17</sup>The Turkish for this thought is remarkably close to the English: "From silence comes confirmation."

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or problem to discuss. All that I want you to do is to look yonder at that young man standing over there." By arrangement İbrahim had been standing behind a door, but at these words of the pasha he stepped out into the open. "This young man," continued the pasha, "has no one in this world but Allah. all know that I have no son but that I do have a daughter. Because my soul reached out toward this young man, I intend-- with the will of Allah and the approval of the Prophet--to have my daughter married to him."

"Ah, so that is it! You have done very well, pasha, and made a suitable match. May Allah make it very successful

Acting as if İbrahim were his own son, the pasha raised a banner outside his mansion, hired musicians, and began a lengthy wedding celebration. The feasting lasted for forty days and forty nights, and at the end of that time, İbrahim and the bride were put into the nuptial chamber together. When they went to bed, however, İbrahim turned his back to the girl, and for all of the years and months that they lived together he never once turned at night to see whether the person in bed with him was a girl or a boy. He knew that if he were to admit to having a wife in his own country, his head would be sent to the executioners, and so he kept quiet about the matter.

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But İbrahim was deeply concerned about this matter, and he worried so much about it that the anxiety finally made him ill. The illness grew worse and worse until he was confined to his bed all of the time. The pasha had many different doctors brought to treat İbrahim, but none of them was able to provide medicine which could improve his condition. One day the pasha invited to his home for dinner several men of his own rank. After they had eaten and drunk to their satisfaction, they carried on a lengthy conversation. While they were talking, İbrahim thought, "This may be my chance! While all of these important men are here, I can ask for a remedy for my condition. If they can find such a remedy, all may turn out well. If they cannot find such a remedy, it would be better that I die all at once at the hands of the executioners than to die slowly drinking poison day after day." He sat up in his bed and put his hand to his ear in preparation for singing. Let us listen to what the assembled pashas heard him sing.

Days of pain have been mine, O Efendis!<sup>18</sup>

Let me now tell you about my malaise.

My hands and arms are bound together,

<sup>18</sup>A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devaluated in the twentieth century that it now is used only for servants and children.

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Restraining my efforts to hold up my woe.  
Praise be to those who perform their jobs well.  
You are my last hope; I now plead for your blessing.  
Whatever our life span, we some day all die  
Then survivors will speak of our deeds for the Faith.  
What in this world can exceed the Koran,  
In which letters are joined. B added to A?  
Ibrahim left saying he would return.  
Perhaps there is someone who waits for him there.

"What?" shouted the pasha. "I shall show you what will happen to you now! Didn't I ask you whether you had anyone in your home territory? You said, 'No,' but now you have shamed me in the presence of all my friends!" Having said this, he called the executioners.

But the guests at the dinner said, "Oh, pasha, control your behavior! That young man spoke those words because we are here. If you were to slaughter him, it would be almost as if you had slaughtered us, too. We shall not permit you to do this."

The pasha argued with them, but no matter what he said they refused to agree with him. When the pasha realized that they were unmoved by his claim, he said, "Very well, then, I forgive him."



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The guests, however, were not convinced that he had really forgiven Ibrahim. They said, "This is no way to forgive, pasha. We shall be here only until midnight at the latest. After that, Ibrahim would be left unaided in your power, and you would be able to do whatever you wished to him. Now that this is all out in the open, call your daughter here and with the will of Allah permit Ibrahim to divorce your daughter. Give Ibrahim a good horse to ride, put some money in his pockets, and let him return to his own country. Then we shall all know that you are a good man."

Realizing that he had no other choice, the pasha called his daughter and said to her, "With the will of Allah, I am going to have Ibrahim divorce you. What do you say about that?"

"Father, I shall be happy if that happens. Do whatever you think is proper

After having Ibrahim divorce his daughter, the pasha gave the young man a good horse, put some money in his pockets, and then said, "You catamite! If I see you anywhere around Aleppo in the morning, I shall have you slaughtered! Now go to hell!"

Although he had been sick for years, he found enough strength to control his horse, feed it, water it, and keep it groomed as he rode toward home. As he rode along, he

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My horse, let us leave Aleppo behind us.  
 Let me not have my neck cut through by a sword.  
 The One who created sustains His pupils,  
 Allows them to flutter away from here.

Flat are the stones on the road my horse travels.  
 Today we shall cross the Tatarca River,  
 Perform our next prayers on its sandy bank.  
 By day's end let us reach Maraş, my horse.

Oh, my horse, by the time you are pawing the ground,  
 Oh, my horse, if the reins slide down on your neck,  
 Oh, my horse, if the foam becomes dry on your mouth,  
 Oh, my horse, by that time let us enter Maraş!

I shall have you reshod in the shop at Emerek  
 There three beauties will weave you a colorful blanket.  
 I shall guide your way through the Koca Şarık.<sup>19</sup>  
 Oh, my horse, let us reach the Pazarca next day

<sup>19</sup>Maraş is the name of a large city and an important province, but many of the other place names refer either to imaginary places or places too unimportant to appear on any but local maps.

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Pazarca's water is near Konalbey.

Smell the roses that bloom on the long plateau.

Protect yourself from the Sızın Mountains.

On the following day let us reach İğdeli

Clear is the air of the plateaus we pass

Wide are the plains in the valleys below

us make our way through the Çakmak Pass

then, my horse, reach İğdeli that day.

İbrahim says, "If my loved one is true

If she is a person to keep her word;

if my horse has the blood of Küheyran,<sup>20</sup>

We'll see my love by the fountain at eve

His cousin had filled her jugs with water at the fountain,  
and she had just reached home with them when İbrahim arrived.

İbrahim dismounted, and the two embraced, clinging to each  
other as tightly as a feverish person grasps a glass of cold  
water

The peach that is large is worth more than others. Its  
pit when planted shoots up from the earth like a bullet past  
the knees of the tall, past the eyes of the short. This story

<sup>20</sup>A term used to describe a full-blooded Arabian horse.

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ends here. Of course the people in this tale did not remain forever in this mortal world but after a while passed into the real world. In this mortal world an ox dies, but its hide remains; a brave man dies, but his fame remains.